SOCIAL NORMS KEY TO DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING

Landscaping Finds Their Influence on Behaviors Across Sectors

An exciting body of knowledge has emerged on the role of social norms — both as barriers and facilitators — in health sector social behavior change (SBC). This landscaping seeks to understand and engage with social norms across six selected USAID sectors to explore the application of and evidence base for social norms approaches. Findings are broadly relevant and highlight promising practices for the Agriculture and Food Security, Education, Energy and Infrastructure, Land and Urban Development, Technology, and Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sectors.

The Strengthening Social Norms Programming activity, which studies social norms programming in sectors outside of health, is being conducted by Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH) under the USAID funded Passages project with support from the USAID's Office of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. The objective of the landscaping was to document social norms approaches and programming and to explore the practice and evidence based for these approaches in the six sectors. The final report was released in May of 2019, and can be read in full here.

WHAT IS PASSAGES?

Passages is an implementation research project that aims to address a broad range of social norms, at scale, to achieve sustained improvements in violence prevention, gender equality, family planning and reproductive health.

The project uses norms-shifting approaches to build the evidence base and contribute to the capacity of the global community to strengthen reproductive health environments, especially for very young adolescents, newly married youth, and first-time parents.

Passages capitalizes on these formative life course transitions to test and scale up interventions that promote collective change and foster an enabling environment for family planning, especially healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies.

SOCIAL NORMS ARE IMPORTANT ACROSS SECTORS

- **Social and especially gender norms are considered barriers to achieving desired results from, and participation in, programs.** Social norms generate four common barriers for women and other marginalized groups to develop and participate in effective interventions: violence, limiting access, and inhibiting participation and decision making.

- **Across the six sectors, the centrality of gender norms—more so than social norms not linked to gender—emerged as an important theme.** Gender norms that disadvantage women were highlighted as barriers to outcomes by all projects in every sector.

- **Social norms contribute to the roles, responsibilities, and power dynamics that drive inequalities** based on sex, gender, disability, ethnic differences, class, education, age, and other factors.

SOCIAL NORMS	DESCRIPTIVE NORM	What I believe others do
	INJUNCTIVE NORM	What I believe others will approve/ disapprove of me doing
GENDER NORMS	Gender norms are a type of social norm. They describe "how people of a particular gender (and often age) are expected to behave, in a given social context"	

Source: Definitions come from the Learning Collaborative to Advance Normative Change

Figure 1, below, provides a visual representation of the importance of social and gender norms as barriers that influence international development programming across sectors. It is notable that of the four social norms identified, three are gender norms affecting women and girls. The fourth, hierarchical power and privilege, is a social norm that can generate barriers on different types of privilege including, but not only, gender.

Figure 1: Social and gender norms are important across sectors
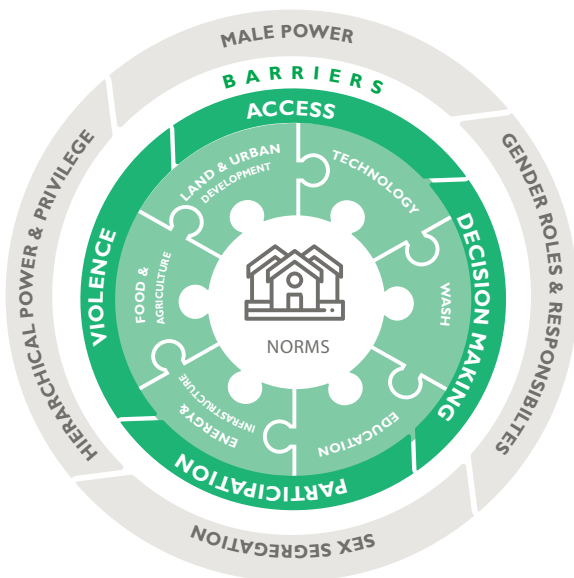
APPROACHES TO SHIFTING SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS ACROSS SECTORS

In all sectors, gaps in knowledge and skills for developing social and gender norms-shifting strategies has led programs to consider norms only as part of gender analyses, rather than as important throughout program lifecycle. As a result, strategies in each sector are not always grounded in recent evidence on how to identify norms and achieve change through norms-shifting strategies. This is true even when programs understand the barriers norms present as well as the importance of norms shifting to their work.

- **Some programs seek to change normative behaviors or practices by addressing non-normative factors,** such as increasing access to or quality of services, with the anticipation this will achieve desired changes in social norms.

- For some programs, despite identifying norms change as important for program success, **it is unclear if expected outcomes and hypothesized pathways of change include social norms change.**

- In keeping with the lack of explicit strategies to shift social norms, **monitoring and evaluation of normative components of programs is often absent.**

Program approaches for shifting norms varies across sectors, creating opportunities for learning across sectors. To date, the existing evidence base from the health sector on how to shift norms comes largely from community-based programming, while in other sectors work to engage and shift norms includes structural interventions and mass media.

CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS PROGRAMMING ACROSS SECTORS

This landscaping uncovered challenges and opportunities within sectors, across sectors, and for cross-sectoral norms programming, as well as recommendations to address them, presented below.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Stakeholders had an awareness of the importance of social and gender norms to their work.There was a lack of standardized definitions and operational guidelines to describe and identify norms related to sector behaviors. An inadequate capacity to design programs and lack of operational guidelines relating to effective normative programming limited cross-sector norms work.

In sectors, there is a desire to learn about social and gender norms, how they relate to sector goals and effective approaches to address them.

TALKING POINTS AND ETHICS

An absence of agency-wide guidance, the assumption that norms programming is too complex and time consuming, and concerns about ethics of shifting norms limit social norms programming. Improving expectations and knowledge regarding shifting social and gender norms would be valuable, as would the development of "talking points" to advocate for normative programming.

GENERATING INTEGRATED PROGRAMMING ACROSS SECTORS

Integrated programming is both a potential leverage point for cross-sectoral work, as well as a challenge to implement structurally.

REQUIREMENTS TO ADDRESS AND REPORT ON SOCIAL NORMS

Framing program requirements and generating evaluation measures for a field that is still nascent remains challenging.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Advances in standardizing terminology and evidence in the health sector can contribute to both work in other sectors and cross-sector work.

2. Develop common social norms terminology and approaches to be used across sectors

3. Strengthen existing approaches, policies, and guidance—such as the 2012 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy, which elevated attention to gender norms—that address how normative change strategies can improve program results.

4. Pursue opportunities to explore how norms operate in different sectors and contexts contributing to expanding evidence and practical guidance.

5. Develop monitoring, evaluation, and learning tools and indicators to measure effectiveness of normative programs and support learning efforts.

6. Develop and support training on the role of social and gender norms to programs, and how to design, implement, and evaluate effective normative programs.

7. Conduct further research on effective pathways to normative change to generate a more robust evidence base for varying contexts and sectors.

HOW WAS THE LANDSCAPING CONDUCTED?

This landscaping focused on six sectors to understand the diverse perspectives and approaches to norms-shifting within USAID and USAID-funded projects. To collect as much information as possible, and recognizing that social norms language is not yet consistently defined across sectors, the landscaping considered programs addressing norms to be those that sought to change behaviors or practices that are caused—in part or entirely—by social norms. The landscaping comprised a stakeholder meeting with GenDev and sector representatives, a literature review of 174 project reports, strategic plans and working papers documents published from 2012 to 2018 identified through the USAID Development Education Clearinghouse (the "DEC"), key informant referrals to relevant documents, and 13 key informant interviews with sector representatives.

This landscaping was an exploratory study that sought to understand the importance of normative change to six sectors in USAID. The next step for this project, case studies of programs in three sectors, supports in-depth understanding of how selected programs are conceptualizing social and gender norms change. Findings include each project's specific approaches and theories of change, challenges, successes, and lessons learned. Ultimately, findings from the overall project will inform recommendations for strengthening USAID's social norms research, policy, and programming, both within and across sectors.

SELECTED "DEEP DIVE" CASE STUDY PROJECTS

Energy and Infrastructure:

The Engendering Utilities Initiative at the Electric Distribution Company utility company in Jordan

WASH:

Uplifting Participation in Water-related Decision-making, part of the Water Resources Integration Development Initiative in Tanzania

Education:

Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity in Uganda

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Passages